

## **Holy Potlucks: Zechariah 14:20-21**

Norwalk Christian Church, June 7, 2015, Disciples Together Series, Proper 5/2nd Sunday after Pentecost

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I'm going to go all in this morning, and say: I think potlucks might be the holiest thing we do as a church. Praying and singing, that's very important. Preaching--well, preaching is hard to top. But potlucks are a thing of beauty. Potlucks are all that is right with the world--all that is holy.

I know what you're thinking: of course the chubby preacher likes potlucks! And yes, I come by it honestly. I grew up in the South--potluck heaven. Fried chicken and mashed potatoes. 15 different casserole dishes. 4 kinds of Lasagna. A plate of peanut butter and jelly and pimento cheese sandwiches. The bowl of green jello salad. And enough cakes, pies and cookies to send us all into diabetic shock.

By the time you made it through the line, it was hard to tell where the green beans ended and the pasta began. Rolls were piled like Jenga pieces on the top of the food pile. It was sacrilege, nay--sin, if you made it through the line without covering every bit of plate with a cacophony of meats, salads and sides.

My grandma, who always brought the finest Blackberry Cobbler to the potluck, had two bits of advice for me as a young preacher. Everytime I'd see her, she'd tell me: "Preach the word, and eat the bird." The word, being the true Gospel. And the bird, being the staple of Southern preachers, the Chicken, usually fried. To her, a church was only as good as it's potlucks.

Yes, I come by my love of potlucks honestly. When the Worship Committee asked Marti and I what kind of meal we wanted for our Installation Service last year...uh, potluck. Yes, of course, the chubby, Southern-raised preacher likes church potlucks. No surprise there.

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But potlucks are Biblical, too! I'm not making this up. When the Hebrew Prophets imagine the future kingdom of God, the Beloved Community where all will be made right, where pain and hunger and all injustice will be gone, the prophets imagine feasts.

We began our worship with our Call to Worship, taken from Isaiah 55. The prophet says: "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

The coming kingdom of God: a banquet, where no matter how much money you have, or what you come with, you will be fed until you are full.

Earlier in Isaiah, chapter 22, the prophet envisions the Mountain of the Lord, where the prophet envisions the day when all the peoples from all over the world will gather together. The dividing lines of language, nation and religion will be no more.

“On this mountain,” Isaiah says, “the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.”

In other words, the Lord will solve all the problems of the world by inviting all the peoples of the world to a big ole holy potluck.

And then we have the text we read this morning. From Zechariah. I’ll be honest with you, I’ve never preached from Zechariah before, and I never even noticed these words until this week. The book is filled with a lot of doom and gloom, vengeance and violence. It’s not feel-good church material.

Yet even in a book like Zechariah, the culmination of the entire prophecy is a holy potluck. Right at the very end of the book, the prophet of God envisions a hopeful future glory of God’s kingdom. And I love the picture the prophet paints.

On that day, all the rivalries of nations will end, and everyone will be invited to a feast in Jerusalem. The temple, the holiest place in all of Israel, will be the staging ground for this feast. The altar, which had been reserved for the holiest of rituals, will become the serving table. And every ordinary cooking pot in Israel, no matter if it holds savory meats, pistachio pudding, deviled eggs or pecan pie--every cooking pot, bowl, plate and dish will be sacred/holy to the Lord, as holy as the sacred objects on the altar.

Oh, and there’s also this strange thing about all the horses wearing signs that say, “Holy to the Lord.” Maybe you should give that a try, Doc Raun. A horse, becoming holy.

The prophet envisions a complete reversal of Holy and Ordinary: the Holy objects of the Temple Altar will be used to serve a meal, and the ordinary dishes from people’s houses will become the sacred vessels of the altar.

Many of you were brought up to believe there was huge wall between the sanctuary and the fellowship hall of a church--the Holy Wall--which kept all the holy stuff inside the sanctuary, and all the secular stuff outside the sanctuary.

In fact, you may find it hard to believe, but I’ve met some Christians in my day who thought it was a sin to have have a fellowship hall in a church building. They got around it by building an adjacent building on the property, with a nice breeze way connecting the two buildings. I’ve worshipped--and ate--in some of those churches, too, and believe me, bad theology didn’t get in the way of a great potluck. Some of the best.

What is holy about our life together? Is it the singing and the praying, the passing of fancy brass plates with individually-portioned cups of grape juice? Is it the organ or the piano. What about a guitar or ukulele, or a colorful handbell choir? Are those holy, too?

Is it a holy moment when we gather Tuesday nights for craft night, young and old, and learn how to paint? Or when seniors show up in our fellowship hall twice a week to exercise? Is it holy when our parking lot is a staging ground for a soap box derby, or a place to sit and watch a 4th of July parade?

Don't talk during worship! It's a holy time. Take your crying babies out! It's a holy time. Should we leave our coffee and snacks out there, never bringing them in here, because this is place is holy? That's what Sanctuary means, after all, Holy Place.

But isn't coffee fellowship time holy, too? The windows may not be of stained glass, but the light that shines in the fellowship hall on a Sunday morning is heavenly. Wednesday night, our youth group had a lock-in, and some of them slept right here, in the sanctuary on the floor. A place of worship, becoming a place of rest.

Where do we draw the line between Holy and Ordinary? Which table is more sacred? The communion table, or the potluck table? Which dishes are more holy?

Translate our text this morning into our day, and the prophet might say to us, "On that day, we will all wear signs that say, "Holy to the Lord". And those dishes out there, on those tables, will become Holy Communion...and Holy Communion will become the Potluck meal. The line between sacred and secular, holy and ordinary will be no more--for all will become holy.

I'm going to go all in this morning, and say: I think potlucks might be the holiest thing we do as a church.

Here, at the potluck table, dishes as diverse as the nations of the world are brought together into one meal. Cooking abilities or no cooking abilities, prepared or purchased, from a box or an old family recipe, all of it comes together into one great banquet.

If you didn't bring any food...maybe you forgot, maybe you couldn't, maybe you just didn't want to...that's okay. The table is open for all, none are turned away, and there is always --ALWAYS--leftovers.

Where one of us to attempt to feed this entire group, it'd break our backs and our banks. But together, we all do a little, and we have more than enough.

Around those tables, people as diverse as the dishes brought share a meal together. Talk about ordinary things: the weather, the crops, politics, TV shows, sports, babies. Ordinary things, yet in the sharing of stories holy moments break out all over the place.

People who are lonely connect with new friends. Old friends remind one another why they need one another.

Conversation and food...filled stomachs and filled hearts--what could be more holy?

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We do a lot of weird things as Disciples Together, but Potlucks may be the weirdest. That's why they're my favorite.

In a moment we will offer a benediction, leave this room and go into Fellowship Hall. But church will not be over. Our worship will continue: as the meat is cut, blessed and served, the drinks poured and spilled, the desserts skipped or indulged, as the casserole is blessed and dished to all at the table--this, too, is worship.

And it is a holy moment, where ordinary food from ordinary people gives life to us all. Where bread is blessed and broken, stomachs are filled, spirits are lifted and none are turned away.

All are welcome at the great potluck of God.